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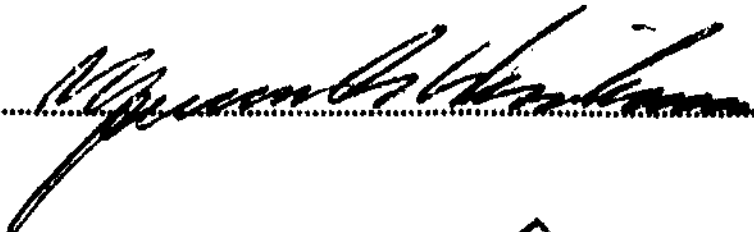
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**THE KURDS IN IRAN AND IRAQ:
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND CULTURE**

By

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for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
in
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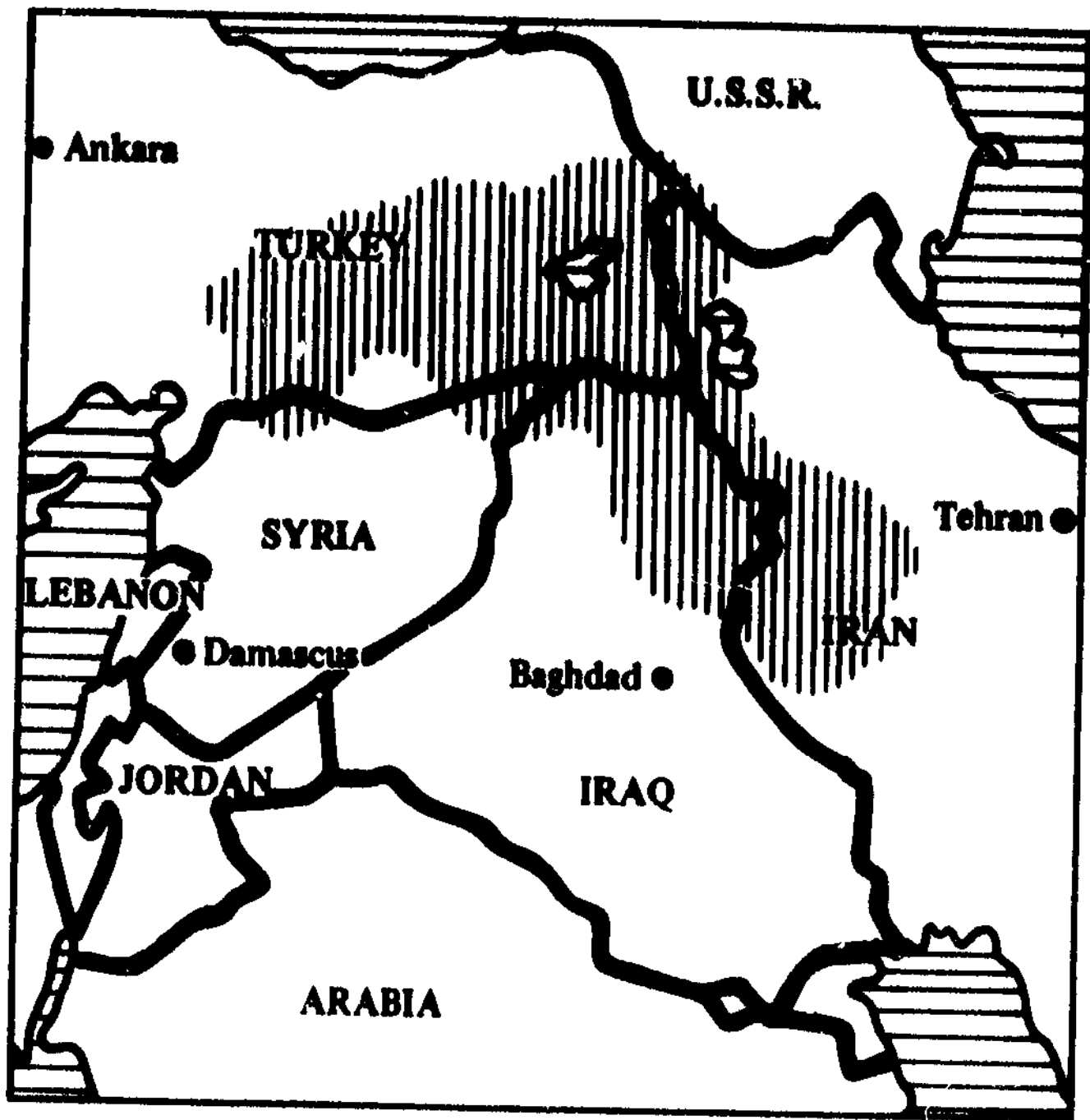
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Regions Populated by the Kurds



Regions inhabited by the Kurdish Nation

INTRODUCTION

The Kurds are an ethnic minority easily distinguished by their culture, language, and national identity. The region they inhabit, Kurdistan, stretches across the corners of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and the Soviet Union. The Kurdish struggle for autonomy provides a contemporary study of an oppressed people striving to liberate themselves. The Kurds are virtually unknown throughout most of the world. Yet their case of national self-determination has special merit.

This study focuses on developments within the Kurdish nationalist movement of Iran and Iraq since 1975. A significant Kurdish population is found in Turkey as well. Although this study does not emphasize their role in the national movement, many of the circumstances and principles of political culture are applicable. In an effort to understand the Kurds in Iran and Iraq as well as the conditions which sustain and have brought changes in this movement, it is important to examine first the roots of Kurdish nationalism, beginning with cultural influences. The political organization of the Kurds and major events in Iran and Iraq after 1974 will be discussed in order to understand the complicated relationships between the organizations and the governments involved in the dispute. Finally, this study broadens to examine Kurdish political culture. Political culture identifies basic values and belief systems which influence the national community. It also recognizes the weaknesses of the movement and the influence

of the tribal community on the emergence of nationalism.

KURDISH CULTURE

Culture is a unifying force among the Kurdish people. The Kurdish nation prides itself on its rich, ancient culture.¹ Although many spiritual and material cultural products have been destroyed as a result of foreign occupation, much of it has survived. Kurdish folklore and literature are plentiful in popular legends. Poems written as early as the 10th century have also been found. The greatest of the poets include Baba Tahir (935-1010), whose poems are well known outside of Kurdistan, Mala Jazire of the 12th century, and Ahmade Khani (1650-1706), the greatest author of classical Kurdish literature. Other famous poets existed in the 17th, 18th, and through the 20th century: all of which contributed to the ever-changing world of art and prose through-out Kurdistan.

Kurdish, the language of the poets and authors in Kurdistan, is of the Indo-European group. Although linguistically parallel to Farsi, the language of their Aryran brothers, Kurdish and Farsi are not mutually intelligible. Kurdish does not yet have a unitary written form. There are two predominant dialects: Kermanji and Sorani. The Kermanji dialect is spoken in the Northwestern part of Kurdistan, where the majority of Kurds live.² The dialect

¹ See Ghassemlou, Abdul Rahman. Kurdistan and the Kurds. Collet's: London, 1965, p.29.

² This includes practically all the Kurds settled in Turkish Kurdistan, in Syria, in the Mosul area in Iraq and north of Urmia in Iran.

prevailed in literature until the advent of World War I. Since then, the Sorani dialect has prevailed. Sorani is spoken in the southeastern region of Kurdistan. It flourished during the Mahabad republic of 1945-1946 and after the Iraqi revolution of 1958. Presently, the Sorani dialect is more widely used in Kurdish literature. However, it is important to note that the two dialects form one distinct language and are mutually intelligible: the Kurds in the north are able to understand the Kurds of the south.³

Language is as important to the Kurds as Hebrew is to the Israelis. The Kurds have consistently demanded that the government allow Kurdish to be the national language in Kurdistan. The Kurds have asked repeatedly that the primary language of education be Kurdish. Only in Iraq have these demands been recognized.

The Kurdish people are the fourth largest group of people in the Middle East. No accurate figures are available from the respective governments because the states aim to underestimate the significance of the Kurdish population. However, the Kurds number between twelve and twenty million people. They inhabit the region of Kurdistan which spans across Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, with small enclaves in Syria and the Soviet Union. (See Map)

The majority of Kurds are Sunni Moslems: in Iran, seventy-five percent of Muslim Kurds are Sunnis, twenty-five percent are Shi'ites.⁴ The Kurds were probably Zoroastrians who submitted to

³Ghassemlou, p.27.

⁴The Kurdish Shi'ites of Iran live in the region of Kermanschah and in Luristan. Known as the Lurs. Chaliand, p.161.

Islam after the Arab conquest. Some Kurds in Iraq practice a mystical approach to Islam called Suffism.⁵ In the Mosul region (in Iraq and Turkey) there also exists a significant number who adhere to the non-Muslim Yezidi religion. Finally, members of other religious groups and sects including the Sarlis, Qizilbash, Ahli Haqq (or Ali Allahi), Christians, and Jews are found among the Kurds.⁶

Education serves as a tool to install or insulate values of nationalism. It is of major importance for schools to advance state interests and ideology. This is the primary reason Kurdish schools remain in the hands of the central government. Both Iran and Turkey have prohibited the use of Kurdish in schools. In Iran, Kurds teach and write in Persian and few actually read Kurdish texts.⁷ In Iraq, however, Kurdish has been accepted as the primary language of instruction in regions where Kurds form the vast majority.⁸ Kurdish children are still required to learn Arabic in order to link them with the Iraqi society at large.

⁵ Pelletiere, Stephen. The Kurds: An Unstable Element in The Gulf. Westview Press: Boulder, Colorado, 1984, p.42.

⁶ Ghassemlou, p.26. Also see Wadi Jwaideh, The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Its Origins and Development, University of Baghdad, 1942. p.47-51.

⁷ Saman de Siaband is an Iranian program associate at the Kurdish Library in Brooklyn, NY. Even though Kurdish is his native tongue, he had never seen a Kurdish book until he came to the United States. CSM 2/8/89.

⁸ McLaurin, R.D., Don Peretz, Lewis Snider. Middle East Foreign Policy. Praeger Press: New York 1982, p.77

The character of the Kurdish people is distinguished by their struggle for self-determination. They have been highly political, first organizing themselves in the late 1920s. The great will of the Kurds is well-known. In the early days, they outwitted the British by their outstanding and reckless horsemanship. Their endurance is also well-documented as the Kurds have served as mercenaries in great wars. Most notably, however, is the Kurds' ability to preserve their identity while their mountainous region has been invaded by the Turks, Persians, Mongols, and Arabs.

Kurdish women enjoy a great deal of freedom and are highly respected in the community. Women play a role in the political struggle as well. First, Kurdish women do not wear the veil nor are they secluded from society. They freely intermingle with men, and are not intimidated as neighboring Arab or Persian women. Women and men dance together at social events such as weddings and feasts. Obviously, this behavior demonstrates that Kurdish society and Kurdish social customs are relatively relaxed.⁹ The position of Kurdish women was also noted by the news correspondent David Adamson. He recorded men's claims that Kurdish women are "more intelligent, attractive, and independent than other Middle Eastern women." Kurdish women have also assumed leadership positions in the tribal community as well as the political community. Many women and schoolgirls played a role in the uprising of 1982 in Iraq. Women have also organized protests against political

⁹ See Jwaideh, p.109.

detainees outside of prisons.¹⁰ Jwaideh documents the influential role of the Kurdish woman in the home. Her counsel is highly respected and usually heeded. In the absence of their husbands, Kurdish women assume authority and act as the head of the household. A Kurdish marriage is governed by the laws and customs of Islam. Islamic law allows for a man to have four wives, however, only the wealthy assume polygamous relationships; most Kurdish men are monogamous.

Finally, the other unique characteristic which distinguishes Kurds from Arabs and Persians is Kurdish dress. Distinctive and flamboyant costumes are typical. Full, flowing clothes draped with floral scarves and cummerbunds are daily wear. Women also tend to hang numerous gold chains about their necks and wrists. Traditional Kurdish dress was banned under Reza Shah in the 1930s and in Turkey in 1937. Once again, the government attempted to assimilate the Kurds.

Kurdish Territory and Economic Activity

Kurdistan is that geographic area which is predominately populated by Kurds. Part of the Kurds' political problems center on the physical properties of the region. For instance, Kurdistan does not have access to the sea. They exist in a mountainous region encircled by many minorities. Geographically they are

¹⁰ Committee Against Repression and For Democratic Rights (CARDRI). Sadam's Iraq: Revolution or Reaction? Zed Books, LTS.: London, 1986. p.130.

divided between five countries. Significantly, Kurdistan separates the Soviet and Western spheres of influence in the gulf region.

Natural resources are also abundant in Kurdistan, in particular, oil, minerals, and water. The Iraqi oil-rich region of Kirkuk and Khanaq are reported to have some of the largest reserves in the world. Kirkuk is the source of sixty-five percent of all Iraqi oil.¹¹ Petroleum is also found in Kermanschah within the Kurdish region of Iran.

Significantly, only a small portion of state revenues are invested in Kurdistan. The industrial sector of the economic community has not grown very much since there has been no major investment in the area. A large degree of urban unemployment is aggravated by migration from the rural to the urban areas. The rapid development which has taken place throughout much of Iran has not reached the remote northern region inhabited by the Kurds. Thus, the Kurdish bourgeoisie is based in the fast growing service sector and around local administration.¹² Even though the Kurdish population comprises twenty-five percent of the Iraqi population, only seven to twelve percent of the Iraqi development budget was allotted to the region during the mid to late 1970s. Four of 150 industrial projects were arranged for Kurdistan. Steel making projects were situated in Arab Iraq despite the fact that the

¹¹ Pelletiere p.167

¹² See Ghassemlou, "Kurdistan in Iran", in Gerard Chaliand, People Without a Country. The Kurds and Kurdistan, Zed Press: London, 1980. p. 116.

mineral deposits are found in Kurdistan. Roads and irrigation efforts have also bypassed areas dominated by the Kurds. Finally, the oil refinery promised for Kirkuk in 1970 was never built there, instead, it was built in Arab Iraq at a greater expense.

The importance of Kurdish oil cannot be understated. Over 65 percent of all Iraqi oil is produced in Kirkuk. Export of Kurdistan's oil earned the Iraqi Treasury more than \$5,762 million in 1974, and \$7,178 million in 1975.¹³ Based on the reports above, an unbalance proportion of revenues, based on population percentage, or mineral wealth, is invested in Kurdistan.

Numerous minerals have been explored in Kurdistan: chrome, copper, lead, zinc, sulphur, coal, and stones are found in various regions. Despite the large amount of natural resources found in the area of Kurdish settlement, the Kurds primarily invest their resources in agriculture, producing basic food staples and tobacco. The Tigris, the Euphrates, and their tributaries provide a plentiful supply of water to important pastoral lands.

KURDISH POLITICS

The Kurds have a strong sense of national identity based on the integrity of the territory of Kurdistan. Kurdish national identity is rooted in the common history of persecution and neglect which they have endured for decades. The Kurds want to align these

¹³ For figures and economic information, see Ismet Sheriff Vanly, "Kurdistan in Iraq" in Chaliand, People Without a Country. p. 176.

cultural, ethnic, geographical associations in national sovereignty. The Kurds are always Kurds first, and Moslems second, a distinction made by choice.

The Kurdish community was traditionally based on nomadic tribes of herdsmen. However, government policies have forced the Kurds to become more sedentary. In the mid 1800s in Iraq, this was accomplished primarily through the sale of community lands to the begs, tribal chiefs, and aghas, heads of the clan, who were virtually turned into wealthy landlords while the Kurds were left to be tenant farmers.¹⁴ Ghassemlou writes that the progress of economic relations and the scarcity of pastures gradually settled the tribes in Iran. Between the two world wars, the Iranian government initiated a policy of forcing the Iranian Kurds to settle. This policy presented serious consequences for the Kurds. First, several thousand Kurds were killed during deportation. Some tribes, like the Jalali, were almost completely exterminated. Secondly, sedentarization closed the borders to economic exchange, thus restricting economic interaction: the Kurds were forced to buy all their needs within the boundaries of Iran.¹⁵ In both Iran and Iraq, the governments chose to settle the Kurdish population so that their interests would be served; they could increase state control by the assurance of military conscription, and increase state revenues through taxes and economic arrangements. Obviously,

¹⁴ see Pelletiere, p.39.

¹⁵ Ghassemlou, p.110.

all these benefits were at the expense of the Kurdish population. In spite of government attempts to detribalize the Kurds, tribal affiliation remains the natural unit of allegiance. The government's attempt to break tribal alliances has been an attempt to divide the Kurds politically, so as to decrease the Kurdish threat to the state apparatus.

The Kurds in Iran and Iraq have several party organizations. Each is headed by a charismatic leader. Even within these political groups, divisions between the modern and traditional elements exist. Many obstacles were overcome before the KDP of Iraq recognized Mulla Mustafa Barzani, a tribal man, as a legitimate representative of their organization. The Kurdish political movement has continually been devoid of unification. Unfortunately, rivalries and hostilities are generally the focus of intra-Kurdish political cooperation.

The Kurds form a nation in Iran and Iraq which is easily distinguished from other groups. After World War I, colonialism geographically divided the Kurds. Consequently, the leaders of the countries they inhabit have chosen to suppress cultural diversity and to exert national unity. Repeated conflicts and warfare have expended vital government resources and attempted to eliminate the Kurdish threat.

KURDS IN IRAN

After a brief period of autonomy in the Mahabad Republic (1945-46), the Kurds have continued to observe inconsistent

behavior, unmet promises, and broken agreements by Iranian governments. While these governments have virtually opposed most Kurdish demands for autonomy, ironically they have supported the Iraqi Kurds in their struggle for independence against the B'athi regime. By 1975, the Algiers Accord terminated Iranian funds to the Iraqi Kurds. However, the Iraqis broke that agreement in 1980 leaving the Iranians free to renew their aid to the Iraqi Kurds.

The Kurds in Iran are estimated at four million or approximately sixteen percent of the population.¹⁶ The Iranian Kurdish movement functions independently of the Kurdish movements in Iraq and Turkey, yet strives to achieve the same goals of autonomy in the Iranian region of Kurdistan.

Kurdish Democratic Party

The primary political organization the Iranian Kurds identify with is the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). It emerged as an intellectual urban movement in the Iranian republic of Mahabad in the 1940s. Initially, the organization was called Komala i Zhian i Kurdistan (the Committee of the Life or Resurrection of Kurdistan) or Komala.¹⁷ The party's purpose was not difficult to define; they sought to institutionalize Kurdish nationalists' goals. Komala's leaders looked to their mature Iraqi counterparts for political advice. Membership was open to any Kurd. Thus Shi'a

¹⁶ CARDRI #3, p.199.

¹⁷ Pelletiere, 103

Kurds and Christian Assyrians, considered to be Kurds by race, were accepted. At the same time, other racial groups such as the Azerbaijani Turks were excluded.¹⁸ Komala grew rapidly, it was formed with a few individuals and quickly spread outside of the Mahabad province. On August 15, 1945, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) was founded in Mahabad with Komala as its base. The KDP program included freedom and self-government for the Kurdish people within the limits of the Iranian state; the Kurdish language to be used in education and to become the official language in administrative affairs; election of the provincial council of Kurdistan; establishment of unity with other oppressed national minority groups; improvement of education, agriculture, and the economic situation; and, finally, efforts to enable the Kurdish people to strive freely for the happiness and progress of their country.¹⁹

Actually, the Komala changed their name to the Kurdish Democratic Party in order to receive aid from the Soviets who insisted that the Kurds associate themselves with the democratic movement of people against fascism. This association was illustrated by incorporating the word "democratic" into the organization's title.²⁰

¹⁸ See Eagleton Jr., William. The Kurdish Republic of 1946. Oxford University Press: London, New York, Toronto, 1963. pp. 33-35.

¹⁹ Ghassemlou, p.76.

²⁰ Eagleton, p.45.

Dr. Abdur Rahman Ghassemlou is the leader of the Iranian KDP. Prior to 1970, the KDP of Iran abandoned a number of progressive goals for a purely nationalist focus. Since 1973, the party has functioned under a bicameral system which consists of a central committee and a congress. Representatives of congress come from all areas of Kurdistan and have voting privileges to determine the future orientation of the Iranian KDP, including membership of the Central Committee. This party has enjoyed the support of many Kurds and was recognized by the Iranian left during the Shah's rule.²¹ The political party was banned by the Iranian government in August 1979 after serious armed clashes between the new Islamic regime and the rebellious Kurds.

In 1981, in response to various accusations made by the Ayatollah Khomeini, Dr. Ghassemlou sought to clarify the position of the KDP. This statement implicitly defines the political doctrine of the KDP then and now. First and foremost, the KDP supports autonomy for the Kurds which he carefully distinguished from independence. Thus the army, national currency, and foreign policy would remain under government control. The purpose of autonomy is for the Kurds to control the internal administration of Kurdistan, to allow children to learn Kurdish language and culture in school, and to direct internal security. Finally, he commented that the KDP strongly supports and are fighting for a

²¹ see A.R. Ghassemlou, "Le Kurdistan d'Iran" in Les Kurdes et le Kurdistan, Edited by Gerard Chaliand, Francois Maspéro: Paris, 1978.

democratic Iran, where all groups, minorities and majorities, may participate free of government oppression. All minorities should be granted status equal to the Kurds and given the right to publish books and other literature in their native language.

Komala

The second and less influential political organization in Iran is named Komala. Komala is the Kurdish word for committee. Very little information is available through the public media on the Komala. However, there is evidence of a Marxist-Leninist orientation independent of Soviet support. This organization commenced public activities in mid 1979. The Komala have advocated overthrowing the Iranian regime as a solution to Kurdish autonomy problems. The Komala joined a couple non-Kurdish leftist groups with a similar agenda in 1984. The Communist Party of Iran was formed from this merger.

Relations between the Komala and the KDP have been difficult. Their different ideologies have been incompatible. The Komala views the KDP as the "bourgeois party of Kurdistan" and the "class enemy." Although confrontations have taken place, the frequency of attacks has been small yet severe. In 1984, clashes held a Komala member responsible for the death of a KDP commander. However, the Komala continue to favor cooperation with the KDP in order to more effectively confront the government. They plan to work out these differences only after autonomy is achieved.

No precise information nor figures are available, but, the

KDP is supposedly the largest and most powerful organization, with the Komala trailing closely behind.²² The KDP enjoys the support of the urban intellectual class and has had stronger relations with the Iraqi government. The Komala's ideological orientation has mainly drawn the intellectuals and low income peoples to it. Thus, the two groups appear to have different spheres of influence.

Political Leaders

In addition to the leaders of the established political organizations, the sheiks, or religious leaders of the Sunni sect, exert considerable influence on Iranian Kurds. Each Sheik of importance has a great number of supporters (murids, dervishes, suffis) among the people. Sheik Ezzodin Hussein is no exception. He has been a voice of the Iranian Kurds for many years. He and his brother, Sheik Jalal enjoy the support of the KDP and the Komala.

In the past, he has acted as a representative of the entire Kurdish republic, advocating Kurdish willingness to negotiate autonomy with the government. The Ayatollah Khomeini responded to the Sheik's influence in 1980 when he issued a death threat to Sheik Hussein.²³

²² "A Glance at the Present Situation in Kurdistan: KDP-Komala Disputes," Iran Press Digest, Vol. 4, No. 29, 23 July 1985. pp. 5, 6.

²³ See London Times, 6 Dec 1979, p. 8. Also Christian Science Monitor, 13 June 1980, p.12.

KURDS IN IRAQ

The country of Iraq is internally divided by various splinter groups. The Arabs and the Kurds are the two major ethnic groups in Iraq. The Kurds comprise about twenty-three percent of the Iraqi population of 13 million, while the Arabs make up the other seventy-five percent.²⁴ The Kurds' (in the north and northeast region of Iraq) call for autonomy has consistently been the source of intense conflict for the Iraqi government. Lacking a common national identity and system of control, repression and violence are used to establish order. This means has generated enormous costs for the government, draining vital resources and diverting attention from foreign affairs.

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) is a well developed organization. Under the leadership of Jalal Talabani, the PUK has attempted to build a popular base through small units. It was established as a "semi-front" of four different Kurdish groups in reaction to Mulla Mustafa Barzani's decision to end the armed struggle in Iraq following the 1975 Algiers Accord.²⁵ The coalition was not only a reaction but also the realization that the Kurdish struggle must be unified if it is to confront successfully its oppressors. Even though the PUK is committed to Kurdish unity, it

²⁴ McLaurin, p.75

²⁵ See Michael Levy, "Kurdish Autonomy in Iraq," in Cultural Survival Quarterly, Vol. 8, no. 4, Dec 1984, p.50-52.

has traditionally experienced conflict with the KDP. Talabani condemns the Barzani leadership as "reactionary."²⁶

After the KDP divided in 1964, Talabani set up headquarters in Damascus. He returned after Barzani fled to Iran in 1975 to direct the Peshmerga guerillas.²⁷ Since his return, the winter headquarters, based in NavZang, has been equipped with shelter for political leadership, training schools, a rudimentary hospital, a printing press, and even a power station.

The PUK is also known for its links to the Iran, both the Iranian regime under the Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iranian Kurds. During a trip to the United States in June 1988, Talabani defended ties to the Ayatollah since the alliance has offered him substantial military support.²⁸ The PUK has informal links with the Iranian Kurdish movement. Talabani decided to help the Iranian Kurds' uprising in 1980. (Barzani opposed this action.) The group provide aid and support during battles and even allowed the Iraqi army to pass through territory under PUK control in order to deliver Iraqi arms to Ghassemlou.

The PUK shares some Arab support as well. It has been linked to Iraqi revolutionary groups including B'ath Socialist Party, Arab Socialist Movement, and Iraqi Communist Party (dependent on Iraqi-

²⁶ See Ali-Fuat Borovali, "Kurdish Insurgencies, the Gulf War, and Turkey's Changing Role," Conflict Quarterly, Vol. VII, no.4, p. 36.

²⁷ The Peshmerga Guerillas, are Kurdish soldiers engaged in armed conflict.

²⁸ New York Times, 6/22/88, p.3.

Soviet relations). Other allies have included "progressive elements" of the Iraqi army, Syrian B'ath sympathizers, Nasserites, and, sporadically, the Islamic movement in Iraq. These groups have aligned to portray themselves as a serious threat with the motive of overthrowing the government and forming a coalition government.

Similarly, their autonomy plans is willing to leave foreign affairs, budget and defence matters in the hands of the government. They, like other Kurdish political organizations, practice an armed struggle using guerilla war tactics against the Iraqi government.

Kurdish Democratic Party

The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) of Iraq was legalized with a leftist program, aimed at radical land reform and a commitment to bring Iraq's foreign policy closer to the Soviet Union and socialist states.²⁹ The KDP was under the leadership of Mustafa Barzani from the late 1950s until his death in 1979. Barzani is notorious for his controversial political actions. He had aligned himself with the Shah of Iran, even fighting against fellow Iranian Kurds. In an interview with The Washington Post, Barzani said he would give mineral and oil rights to an American Company in return for U.S. support.³⁰ Much of Barzani's activities were devoted to

²⁹ See Hassan Arfa, The Kurds: An Historical & Political Study. Oxford University Press: London, 1966. p.75,106.

³⁰ Interview with Washington Post 22 June 1973. In J.M. Abdulghani, Iraq and Iran: The Years of Crisis. Croom Helm: London, Sydney, 1984. p.138

consolidating and expanding his own position as a Kurdish leader, ironically, at the expense of the Kurdish movement.³¹

Until Mulla Mustafa Barzani became the leader, the intellectuals were unable or unwilling to tolerate the "backwardness" of the less-educated tribesmen. Barzani's position made the party appear more flexible and accepting. As a result, the KDP became more popular among tribesmen and membership began to cut across class lines. However, cooperation suffered in 1964; the KDP leaders of Iraq and Barzani's Kurdish tribes were in disagreement. This conflict resulted in Barzani driving the KDP leaders, Jalal Talabani and Ibrahim Ahmad, into Iran. Barzani was an integral part of the Kurdish movement. His fierce and charismatic personality confronted government forces and rallied the people. Barzani's support for the Kurdish national movement lasted his entire lifetime. His death, in March 1979, marked the end of a great period in Kurdish history. Following the Algiers Agreement and the subsequent departure of Mulla Mustafa in 1975, the KDP splintered into several factions, including the Kurdish Democratic Party Provisional Command (KDPPC). The KDPPC is led by Barzani's sons Idris and Masoud. The Barzanis have followed paternalistic tradition by cooperating with the Iranian government. The KDP Preparatory Committee under the leadership of Mahmoud Uthman, as well as other small organizations, claim to represent

³¹ McLaurin p.98

Kurdish nationalists in Iraq.³²

The Kurds have joined other oppressed groups to form coalitions such as the High Committee of the Progressive National Front and the Democratic Patriotic Front. The Progressive National Front is a coalition building organization of progressive elements in the Iraqi political community. The government allows this group to exist as a device to minimize conflict and rivalry among contending political parties.³³ The Democratic Patriotic Front (DPF) and the Democratic Patriotic and National Front (DNPf), both were organized in November 1980. The DPF front includes the Iraqi Communist Party, the Kurdistan Democratic Party, and the Kurdistan Socialist Party. They advocated the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and a coalition government which will grant Kurdish autonomy. Some Arab nationalists were against KDP membership, instead they favored the PUK, thus the DNPf was formed.³⁴ Factional divisions continue to plague the coalitions and deter their attempt to unify and pose a serious threat to the regime of Saddam Hussein.

KURDS IN TURKEY, SYRIA, AND THE U.S.S.R.

The Kurds in Turkey represent a significant portion of the population, in the census of 1970 there was 8.5 million Kurdish speakers or 23.8 percent of the population. The region of

³² McLaurin, p. 104.

³³ McLaurin, p.88

³⁴ CARDRI, p.172-173.

Kurdistan within Turkey is the largest and most populous part of Kurdistan. Official state ideology presents the ethnic group as a Turkic people or Mountain Turks and Kurdish as a dialect of Turkish. Any opposition to this view is considered subversive and is immediately punished. Social services such as education and health care are extremely poor in Kurdistan. Many Kurds, some estimates suggest as high as seventy percent, are illiterate. Like those in Iran and Iraq, the Kurds are predominately Muslim. Many Kurds live in rural areas. Although rapid urbanization has taken place, the social status of the Kurds is low. Many are unemployed and live in shanties or slums. Political organizations were formed rather recently and are frequently engaged in armed struggle. As a substitute for arms however, leaders of the political movement have recognized the effectiveness of peaceful struggle and have begun to employ such strategies.

The Kurds in Syria and the U.S.S.R. are numerically less significant than the Kurds in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. In Syria, there are an estimated 825,000 Kurds.³⁵ Historically, Syrian Kurds have been repressed, Kurds have been subjected to administrative harassment, police raids, and re-settlement policies. Kurdish literary works have been seized or banned, and folk music has been forbidden. However, in 1976, tensions were relaxed by the government. Most Kurds live relatively free of oppression, however, an informal Kurdish movement exists. The frontiers of the

³⁵ See Mustafa Nazdar, "The Kurds in Syria", in Chaliand, People Without A Country. p.211.

U.S.S.R. do not include any region predominately populated by Kurds or contiguous with Kurdistan. However, several Kurdish communities are scattered throughout the Transcaucasian and Central Asian Republics, in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kirghiz, and the Turkoman S.S.R. Soviet Kurds enjoy a respected and prosperous position in Soviet society. Despite the distance between the communities themselves and between them and Kurdistan, Soviet Kurds retain their ties to Kurdistan through language and other customs.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE '70S AND THE '80S

KURDISH AUTONOMY IN IRAQ

A Kurdish autonomous region was created by the national government of Iraq in 1974. Autonomy provides a small amount of self rule in three governorates, one of which functions as the administrative center. The elective legislative council is invested with the power "to develop the region and promote its social, cultural, constructional, and economic utilities within the bounds of the state's general policy, to suggest a budget for the region....." The autonomy plan established an Executive Council to administer the region.³⁶ Kurdish is the language for all official communications. However, the Iraqi central government maintains effective control over the administrative affairs of the

³⁶ McLaurin, p.86, 103. See Appendix A for chart compiled by authors of this book which outlines the autonomy plan.

region. The Kurds have limited authority over internal affairs; they administer justice, domestic policy, and internal security. Positions of financial executive and the judicial powers are in the hands of the B'ath.

THE ALGIERS ACCORD

On March 7, 1975, during an OPEC conference in Algiers, Iran and Iraq agreed to end their longstanding rivalries. At that time, the Algiers Accord settled the controversial Shatt al-Arab border dispute and effectively ended Iranian support to the Iraqi Kurds. Arab and Kurdish response to the arrangement was one of great surprise.

The Shatt al-Arab is the wide estuary of the Tigris river forming the southernmost border of Iraq. This waterway links the only Iraqi deep water port at Basra to the Persian Gulf. The Shatt has continually been a source of tension between Iran and Iraq. This particular agreement established the thalweg or median line as the international boundary between Iran and Iraq.³⁷ Exclusive Iraqi control of the Shatt was effectively terminated and unlimited Iranian navigational rights were introduced.

In addition, the Accord ended Iranian aid to the Iraqi Kurds and closed the northern border between Iran and Iraq. Both parties recognized the oppressed minorities as each government's vulnerability. Thus, in the early-to-mid 1970s, Iraq supported the

³⁷ On the Iraq side, the Algiers Agreement abrogated the Sa'dabad Pact of 1937.

Baluchis and the Arab rebellions in Iran while Iran aided the Kurdish movement in Iraq. Both Iran and Iraq wanted to manipulate internal weaknesses of their enemy to serve their own national interests.

Iranian support of the Iraqi Kurds fomented their unrest. External support magnetized their confidence and solidified their determination to achieve their goals of autonomy. Thus, the motivating force for Iraq to sign the accord was to force Iran to cease support of the Iraqi Kurdish rebellion which had consumed enormous amounts of Iraqi financial and military resources. McLaurin writes that external Iranian aid to the Kurds intensified Iraqi fears. Accordingly, Iraq's dependence on Soviet military equipment became more extensive during the 1970s. Soviet military advisers and substantial supplies of equipment encouraged the Iraqi regime to renew their offensive against Barzani and the KDP peshmerga guerillas. However, the Algiers agreement effectively ended the war between the government in Baghdad and the Kurds in the north. After the announcement, Mustafa Barzani proclaimed defeat and ended his rebellion. He and his family, close associates, and the KDP Peshmerga fled to Iran while some Kurds remained in Iraq. The Iraqi government offered amnesty to all rebels who would lay down their arms.

Barzani's evacuation left a temporary power vacuum in Iraqi Kurdistan which was filled by old Barzani cohorts, Talabani and Ahmad. Jalal Talabani, leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, moved from Damascus in order to re-organize the remaining Iraqi

peshmerga guerillas. Ibrahim Ahmad, former Secretary General and ideological leader of the KDP returned to Iraq to assume the political leadership vacancy.

The Iraqis' desire and need to get the better of the Kurds simultaneously coincided with the Iranian objective to end bitter frontier disputes and hostilities. The Algiers Accord of 1975 eliminated Kurdish interference in the Iran-Iraq power struggle for control of the Persian Gulf. Finally, the closed Iranian border between Iraq and Iran ended any renewed subversive activities within Iran and prevented the Iraqi Kurds from receiving Iranian aid.³⁸

THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

Separatist movements such as the Kurds' were heavily oppressed during the third quarter of the century. The Shah refused to recognize the existence of Kurds as a distinct ethnic group. Rather, assimilation was vigorously advocated as a remedy to unify the minorities within Iran.³⁹ SAVAK, the Iranian secret police, were active in Iranian Kurdistan as well. The corrupt activities of SAVAK was a major complaint of the Kurds and other opposition

³⁸ The Iraqi Kurds were also receiving aid from both Israel and the United States. Israeli advisers among Iraqi Kurds were confirmed by Prime Minister Begin. Kurdish unrest diverted Iraq's attention and resources from "Zionist imperialism". The United States, on the other hand, was closely aligned with the Shah of Iran and supported his aspirations to control the Persian Gulf.

³⁹ See Ghassemlou, "Le Kurdistan d'Iran" in Gerard Chaliand, Les Kurdes et Kurdistan. Francois Maspero: Paris, 1978. p.187.

groups. Barzani was accused of cooperating with SAVAK against the Iranian Kurds. The Kurds demanded that the government eliminate corrupt repression and place internal security control in Kurdish hands.

The Kurds in both Iran and Iraq looked towards the Iranian Revolution for a solution. Khomeini's promise to liberate and to equate the status of oppressed minorities generated large amounts of support for the Islamic fundamentalists. These hopes were soon dashed by the increasingly repressive and anti-minority stance of the Islamic regime. Instead of working with the Ayatollah Khomeini, the Kurds began to take advantage of the new revolutionary government's weaknesses. Shortly after the Islamic republic was established, the Kurdish offensive was renewed.

The province of Mahabad was once again the scene of conflict between Kurdish rebels and government forces. The clashes ended in a stalemate and the two parties went to the negotiating table. The government proposed an eight point plan for limited autonomy. This plan was rejected by the Kurds. Thereafter, the Komala initiated fighting in the province of Sanadaj which ultimately led to more negotiations. These negotiations were partially successful, Ibrahim Yunes (a Kurd) was appointed governor of Iranian Kurdistan. A committee of Kurds was given power to appoint security forces in the province and to oversee the provincial administration of Kurdish schools.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Pelletiere, p. 179.

Stephen Pelletiere suggests that these particular rebellions were the result of an dramatic increase in wheat prices subsequently undercut by the government. In the last days of the Shah's rule and the early days of the Ayatollah's, wheat prices rose from 8,000 rials to 15,000 rials. The Kurds realized a fortune was to be made in the wheat producing region of Kurdistan. However, they were short-changed by Khomeini's control of profiteering. Thus, the Iranian Kurds reached into their arms cache and instigated a revolt.⁴¹ Khomeini's action regarding the wheat provided the necessary impulse to reinitiate the Kurdish rebellion. However, if this event had not occurred, some other action by the Iranian government would have instigated a renewed offensive. The Kurds supported Khomeini because he suggested that he would be the liberator of minorities. His failure to do so placed the Kurds into the retrospective position of pre-Khomeini days.

Ayatollah Talaghani, Sheik Ali-Tehrani, and Banisadr were the chief mediators of the dispute. Spehr Zabih, in his book Iran Since the Revolution, notes Khomeini's repeated attempt to thwart peaceful settlements. By the summer of 1979, Khomeini had declared a jihad, or Islamic Holy War, on the Kurds. The Islamic leader wanted the Revolutionary Guards to successfully defeat the Kurds. Continually hopeful of a military victory, the Ayatollah would

⁴¹ During this period, countless weapons were smuggled into Iran by Iraqi refugees and stored for later use. These weapons, were used for the Iranian Kurdish revolt immediately after the revolution.

reject imminent proposals of autonomy.

The Kurds, at this time, controlled eighty percent of their region. They opted to withdraw from the major cities and towns to the mountainous regions of Kurdistan. This liberated region was controlled by all the Kurdish groups. Furthermore, Ghassemlou turned down a seat in the Constitutional Assembly, Sheikh Hussein denounced the election of two non-Kurdish parliamentary representatives from Mahabad as a fraud. The Ayatollah was irate, he declared an all out offensive on the Kurds.

In an attempt to pacify Khomeini and convince him that they would not align with either superpower, the KDP congress of April 1980 announced their support for the government of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Banisadr, the president, went on record for his support of the local minorities' right for limited autonomy. Dr. Ghassemlou in April 1981 sought to clarify the position of the KDP: they sought autonomy, not independence. He reiterated support for democracy in Iran, or, in other words, the full participation of the Iranian masses and freedom of political parties. Ghassemlou also rejected allegations that the KDP of Iran had accepted foreign aid and announced that the KDP had no intention of doing so.⁴²

FORCED ARABIZATION

The late 1970s and early 1980s was a period of deportation and devastation for the Iraqi Kurds. Between 1975 and 1978, the

⁴² Sepher Zabih, Iran Since the Revolution. Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, Maryland, 1982. p. 85,86,87.

Committee Against Repression and For Democratic Rights in Iraq estimated that over 1000 Kurds were executed in Iraq and thousands of Kurds were forcibly removed from their homes. An estimated 350,000 people were deported during this period and 240 Kurdish villages were burned down. Furthermore, all legal means of expression for Kurds were banned, including the Kurdish press, their political, social, and vocational organizations.⁴³ In the 1980s, the Cultural Survival Quarterly reports that between 1976 and 1986 approximately half a million people were forcibly removed from 1,500 villages in Iraqi Kurdistan. The majority of them were Kurds, but Assyrians and non-Muslim Yazidi were also deported.⁴⁴ Many of these Kurds were resettled in Southern Iraqi deserts, while others fled to Iran. Deported Kurdish families were rehoused in army-type barracks. Over 500,000 Iraqi Kurdish refugees were absorbed into Iran. The forced Arabization of ethnic minorities was effectively a renewed offensive against the Kurds. The Iraqi government want to re-populate the area with other ethnic groups so the Kurds would no longer be the majority. Arabization attempted to destroy Kurdish morale, separate entire families, and reek havoc on the entire Iraqi Kurdish population.

⁴³ CARDRI, p.50.

⁴⁴ See Levy, p.29.

THE GULF WAR

In September, 1980, Iraq abrogated the Algiers Treaty and Iraqi forces entered Khuzestan. The Kurds played an interesting role in the Iran-Iraq conflict. Both Iran and Iraq wanted the Kurdish wars to continue so that the energy of the enemy was not specifically centered on the war. As a result, Iran enjoyed the support of the Barzanis in Iraq, while Iraq has supported Ghassemlou of the Iranian KDP and cooperated with Talabani of the PUK.

In December 1980, Iraq began to support the Iranian Kurdish autonomy movement and Iraqi forces entered Iranian Kurdistan. Iraq pursued a strategy of dismembering Iran by aiding its separatist movements.⁴⁵ Actually, this invasion moved the war out of the Gulf and rendered a dual enemy for the Iranians: the Kurds and the Iraqis. This was an effective, intense offensive which inevitably led to Tehran's unsuccessful offer in April 1981 to offer amnesty to all Kurdish rebels who would lay down their arms.

Ironically, Saddam Hussein simultaneously supported the deaths of Iranian Kurds while he was brutally suppressing his own Kurdish population. By employing Iranian Kurds in battle, it appeared that Saddam Hussein was cooperating with the Kurdish group. However, he was acting consistently with government policy which aimed to eliminate the Kurds. Through warfare, Kurds were being killed, who

⁴⁵ See "A New Front in a Slow War", The Economist 3 Jan 1981, vol 278: p. 28-29. Also Pelletiere, p.184.

was actually killing them was trivial.⁴⁶ In response to chemical warfare, forced deportations, and other ill-treatment, the Iraqi Kurds renewed their offensive during this time period as well. The Kurds, as did the central governments, recognized the dramatic vulnerabilities the war provided for all the involved parties.

In the summer of 1983, Iran invaded Iraqi Kurdistan. At that point, the Barzanis and the Iranian government coordinated their attack. Talabani was engaged in armed conflict with the Iraqi government at the time of the invasion. Unfortunately, intense rivalries between Barzani and Talabani prevented them from joining together to attack Iraq. Rather, Talabani accepted negotiations with the Iraqi government to avoid fighting alongside the Barzanis. Iraq desperately needed the Kurdish rebels under Talabani to fight Barzani and the Iranians and for Talabani to refrain from attacks on the government; too many war fronts were exhausting Iraqi military resources.⁴⁷ Iraq had failed to hold off Iranian land advances, although it had made substantial gains at sea.

A ceasefire was arranged almost immediately, but autonomy negotiations between Talabani and Iraq were dragged out over a ten month period. The most controversial dispute was over the oil-rich region of Kirkuk, which the Iraqis did not want to release to Kurdish control. Finally an agreement of limited Kurdish autonomy

⁴⁶ This idea was brought up by Dr. Vera Beaudin Saeedpour, Creator and Director of the Kurdish Library in Brooklyn, NY during an telephone interview on 4/24/89.

⁴⁷ Pelletiere, p.186. See also "The Kurds: The War Within a War," The Economist 29 Sept. 1984. vol 292: p. 39.

was made in return for PUK support in the north. In January 1984, the two adversaries exchanged prisoners. The Kurds' primary responsibility was to act as border guards. No agreement was ever reached and the brief ceasefire broke down. Although it was advantageous for the Iraqi government to negotiate a settlement, circumstances had become less tense. There had been little land warfare which reduced the importance of the ceasefire to the Iraqis; therefore, the Iraqis were extremely reluctant to immediately relinquish Kirkuk.

AFTER THE CEASEFIRE: THE KURDS TODAY

During the summer of 1988, Iran accepted United Nations Resolution 438 calling for a ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq War. Since that time, the Kurdish battle has intensified. The Iraqi government condemns the Kurds in Iraq as traitors and terrorists because they allied with enemy forces and fought against government troops. Since Iraqi troops were freed from war, a renewed government offensive has led to mass destruction in Kurdistan. Chemical warfare has been employed to eliminate the Kurdish "problem." Furthermore, reports suggest that in 1988 villages were being bulldozed and entire towns razed. As a result of these tactics, thousands of Kurds fled to Turkey and the international community has "condemned" Iraq for the use of chemical weapons. The United States Congress went so far as to propose sanctions against the Iraqi government. This resolution prohibited the sale or export to Iraq of weapons, military equipment, and items such

as trucks, helicopters and computers that could be used by the military. However, the resolution was unsuccessful as were other international attempts to provide aid to the Kurds.

Most recently, there have been reports that since 1987, the Kurdish leaders have put aside quarrels to form a working relationship. An Iraq-Kurdistan Front has been formed between the KDP and PUK, as well as other smaller groups in Iraq. This front has established cordial relation with Ghassemlou in Iran. Some analysts suggest that the Kurds are more unified today than ever before. However, details of this agreement have been concealed from the public and, therefore, it is difficult to determine the extent of the collaboration.⁴⁸

KURDISH POLITICAL CULTURE

When I initially began this project, I asked myself, why do the Kurds continue to struggle for autonomy? Why do the Kurds or any national movement subject themselves to such devastation? Why would they want to assume responsibilities of independence? Now, I realize that Kurdish life is deeply embedded in Kurdish culture and identity. Societal traditions which so many take for granted are precisely what the governments of Iran and Iraq are trying to deprive them. Suppression, oppression, and repression are forces the Kurds have confronted for decades and will face in future days. They have acquired the necessary resources to counter these forces;

⁴⁸ Interview with Dr. SaeedPour of the Kurdish Library in Brooklyn, NY.

yet they are unable to permanently defeat them.

VALUES

It is important to understand basic Kurdish values and what is important to them.

Independence: Within their own political culture and outside of it, the Kurds want to provide for themselves. They want an equitable share of the country's wealth so that they may distribute it throughout their territory.

Religion: Religious freedom is an important aspect of Kurdish goals of mutual equality. Although most Kurds are Muslim, their national identity has precedence over their religious one. Religious affiliation is recognized as a personal choice, and not seen as a matter of the state, primarily because all Kurds are not Sunni Muslims, and Sunni Kurds in Iran are persecuted by the Islamic Republic.

Language: The Kurds share something unique that Arab and Persian countrymen and country-women do not adhere to. A distinct society and common history separates them from their oppressors and creates a character unique to the Kurds. Language and expression are invaluable. Language identifies common Kurdish history. It serves as a vehicle to initiate Kurdish children into the society. This inalienable cultural right assures freedom to study, to publish, and to communicate in one's own language.

Non-discrimination: The Kurds value the right to equality and to identify with one another. They are rejected in Iran

because they adhere to Sunni Islam. Iraq has not only discriminated on economic grounds, but also attempted cultural genocide. The Kurds recognize the right of minorities to associate freely and to preserve their identity.

These values are the basis of Kurdish political culture. It is a separatist movement primarily because these characteristics unquestionably intimidate their oppressors. The governments have ruthlessly repressed the Kurds by denying them their cultural heritage. Kurdish solidarity is a response to this oppression.

ALLEGIANCE

Allegiance is the bond which attaches the Kurds to their liberation movement. Although no empirical data is available, one may speculate that a sense of political obligation and emotional sentiments, and links to the sovereign bodies explain Kurdish allegiance. Most Kurds are politically obligated to support Kurdish autonomy. A sense of duty to the movement is evident. The nation as a symbol and an expression creates some type of emotional and social contract. The movement has reached all elements of society; it was initiated in the intellectual circles and sustained by the tribal community. The actual movement has reached almost every geographical region in Kurdistan, from the cities to the difficult terrain of the mountain ranges. When David Adamson, a British journalist, travelled through Kurdistan, he depended on the extensive networking system which passed him from one mountain village to the next, and to and from the cities. Different groups

and communities contributed to his successful, safe travels and extensive journal of interviews with influential political leaders.⁴⁹

Personal sentiments cultivate this sense of obligation. First, Kurdish values are inherent. This essential innateness creates ties to the larger Kurdish movement. Secondly, personal loss creates a political obligation. Because Kurdish history is plagued with continual wars, most families have lost a loved one through violence. The introduction of chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq War has subjected the entire population, including children and the elderly, to the harmful effects of chemical warfare. The deterioration of personal safety and the destruction of the family unit renews the allegiance of the individual to the Kurdish struggle.

The Kurds are linked to the central government by international law. Laws imposed by a foreign body immediately after World War I instigated their problems. However, the Kurds do not aim to sever these imposed connections to the central government. They have recognized the complexity of the global arena and realized their limits. Thus, they want the central government to remain as external security. The line is difficult to draw, yet some dependence is necessary. A geographically divided Kurdistan would have a difficult time establishing their own currency, diplomacy, and other institutions a nation state must

⁴⁹ David Adamson. The Kurdish War, Praeger: New York, Washington, 1964. pp.1-121.

support. The pragmatic Kurds have recognized the limits of their aspirations. They can only be realistic about what they might achieve when they have the opportunity. Thus, they will retain ties to the central governments.

THE EMERGENCE OF NATIONALISM

The cause of and the reaction to the struggle is the development of Kurdish nationalism. Nationalism is an ideology which claims to represent the supreme values of the state and its citizens.⁵⁰ Conversely, the sentiment and attachment of a people to a nation and to its interests may also constitute nationalism. A defensive Kurdish population has developed like goals to use their language and to preserve their identity. Allegiance, political obligation, and an awareness of these concepts correlates to form national identity. Kurdish nationalism has evolved in accordance with recent modernization. As a society develops and becomes more modernized, improved communication and centralization yield a keen sense of nationalism. This parallel is evident from the role of urban intellectuals and the importance of tribal values in contemporary political organizations.

Political consciousness first emerged among urban intellectuals. These educated individuals recognized the need to align themselves in order to fulfill their political goals. The intellectuals gave rise to various organizations which sought to

⁵⁰ as defined by Chaliand, English text, p.9.

realize this new-found group consciousness and to popularize a support base. Until then, the tribe was the predominant unit of allegiance. Tribal affiliation is still evident in Kurdish society, however, political commitments have been re-directed from the tribe to larger, less distinct, less secure political organizations in the community. Many aspects of tribal politics have transcended from the traditional environment and continue to characterize contemporary political organizations.

As Kurdish tribes became more sedentary, allegiance to the tribe gradually decreased. Firstly, a single tribe was not a sufficient force to seriously threaten modern government forces. Improved communication also forced the Kurds to realize that Kurds everywhere shared the same goal of an autonomous province. As life became more settled and communities grew larger, a common identity emerged among the Kurdish people. This national identity is concerned with their right to exist and the integrity of cultural and territorial survival.

Because the Kurds began to recognize this national identity, they also realized that a voice of expression was necessary. As a result, political organizations and Kurdish publications came into existence. The Kurdish press emerged as early as 1898. Kurdish publications during the Mahabad Republic included a newspaper and a political monthly periodical, both called Kurdistan. There were also published two primarily literary

magazines, Havar and Hilal.⁵¹ Today, many books and pamphlets are published clandestinely in Kurdistan. Underground newspapers and political literature exist, but possession may result in severe punishment.

The political unit broadened outside of the tribal base and political parties were formed within the Kurdish national movement. Tribal elements have persisted in Kurdish politics, taking root in leadership, factionalism, and socialism.

Charismatic leaders have dominated Kurdish societies since the early days. These leaders have a magnetic effect on people. Tribal chiefs or begs held the highest status in the tribal community; their family enjoyed the benefits of the position as well. Aghas, also referred to as descendants of the Kurdish Lords, enjoyed a prestigious, influential role in the political community. Influence yielded to these leaders is astounding. During the nomadic years, extensive tribal organization was necessary to fend off attackers since all valuable tribal possessions were present. However, the charismatic leader presents us with a contradiction in Kurdish character: Kurds are fiercely independent, yet they obey and respect political leaders.

Charismatic leaders are typical of present-day Kurdish political organizations. Most political leaders retain their positions for many years. If and when difficulties emerge, there

⁵¹ see A. Roosevelt, "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad", in Chaliand, English text, p. 146.

is usually a power struggle which inevitably eliminates the opposition. Elimination, in this case, does not refer to death. Rather, the ostracized individual usually coalesces with or creates another political organization.

Barzani was the leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Iraq for most of his political career. From 1958 until his death, he was vital to the Kurdish nationalist movement of Iraq. When internal problems developed between he, Ahmad, and Talabani in the mid-1960s, the latter two bowed to his control and left the country. Only after Barzani's "defeat" and subsequent departure from Iraq in 1975 did the former activists return to organize the Iraqi Kurds.

Finally, the other element reminiscent of tribal days is the socialist orientation of most modern day political organizations. Contemporary Kurdish socialism is linked to tribal communism. Historically, tribal lands were owned communally; food and work was distributed cooperatively. Kurdish values are based on communal property; everyone has some portion of the wealth. However, it is interesting that the Kurdish urban educated organizers initiated this leftist orientation when they were the societal group who chose to move away from the tribal community.⁵² Yet, socialism offered the necessary subscription for national liberation.

⁵² See Hagleton, p.50.

Theoretically, socialism closely identifies with oppressed groups.⁵³ Ghassemlou, the influential leader of the Iranian Kurds, writes under a strong socialist influence in his book, Kurdistan and The Kurds. He acknowledges that both Marx and Lenin avow the right to self-determination to every nation. He directly quotes Lenin: ".... the self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies and the formation of an independent and national state." Marx predicted the rise of the proletariat would inevitably overcome the bourgeoisie who sustained class distinctions. These "class" distinctions are sustained by the racist, selfish attitudes of the suppressive regimes. The Kurds can clearly identify with the ideology of Marx for it could have been written for them.

Today, modern political organizations have replaced tribal political identities. Certain tribal elements have surpassed timely constraints and play a role in contemporary political organizations. The importance of Kurdish leaders may not be understated. The Kurdish struggle is dominated by a fierce dedication to Kurdish nationalism. The Kurds are committed to maintain their national identity through political action. Kurdish consciousness has distinguished its rights and allegiances from those of the state. Furthermore, it has given strength to the

⁵³ For instance, the communists in South Africa were the first to recognize the fundamental inequality of apartheid.

ideology of Kurdish self-determination.⁵⁴

WEAKNESSES

A primary weakness of the Kurdish movement is base on regional, political geography. Kurdistan is a land locked country surrounded by hostile peoples. Furthermore, the region is partitioned between five separate countries. Neither the Iranians, Iraqis, or neighboring governments want to see the Kurds succeed because it could excite other regional ethnic minorities. Thus, the likelihood of a single unified Kurdish state incorporating Turkish, Syrian, Iraqi, Iranian, and Syrian Kurds is highly doubtful. The division between five separate countries is a serious disadvantage to the Kurdish population.

Economically, the region of Kurdistan has not enjoyed the level of development experienced in Iraq and Iran at large. Most Kurds live in small villages of five or ten families to larger villages of upto ten thousand. Economic prosperity has not been extended to these villages. A vast discrepancy exists between the larger Arab and Persian community and the Kurds. Furthermore, a split occurs within the Kurdish community as well. The intellectual upper class is made up of military offices, scholars, and professors. At the same time, many peasants are still living in a semi-feudal environment. Large landholders (30-50 hectares)

⁵⁴ For a theoretical discussion of nationalism, see Roger Scurton, A Dictionary of Political Thought, (Hill & Wang: New York, 1982) p. 315, 316.

have been dissolved, and land redistribution has taken place. In 1975, estimates suggested that over fifty percent of rural Iranian dwellers remained landless, while thirty-two percent owned between one to three hectares.⁵⁵

Another important economic factor affecting the Kurds is their oil resources and lack of oil wealth. Although this topic has already been explored, suffice it to say that neither the Kurds nor the Iraqis are willing to release this land. Neither party can afford it financially so the issue will continue to frustrate any possible settlements.

The gap between the upper and lower class parallels the traditional versus modern segments of society. Difficulty between these two groups has caused uncertainty in political organization. It is often awkward for a more traditional leader to secure a leadership position. Chaliand and Ghassemlou also suggest that the lack of economic development within Kurdistan has made the Kurds "backwards" compared to other peoples in the region. In their opinion, "traditionalism" is detrimental to nationalistic objectives because it encourages divisions within Kurdish society.

"A traditionalism in values, mentality and behavior has still not been replaced by an adaptation to the codes of modernity; however the knowledge and use of this ritual modernity engenders no real change. The fundamental values are still those of yesterday: tactical cunning instead of political analysis, clientist manoeuvrings instead of political mobilization, and a few revolutionary slogans instead of a real radical

⁵⁵ See Chaliand, p. 116. (English text)

practice."³⁶

I think that representatives and leaders of the Kurdish movement must continue to develop skills of diplomacy and political networks. In addition to the armed struggle, the Kurds should attempt to solidify their support within Kurdistan and in the international community.

Finally, if the Kurds are seriously considering their quest for autonomy, they must establish some nation building institutions. The Kurds have limited resources, yet legitimate organizations should be developed to facilitate autonomy once it is achieved and to improve the legitimacy of the Kurdish movement.

THE FUTURE OF THE KURDS

The immediate future of the Kurds has been effected by the recent ceasefire between Iran and Iraq. The Kurds held a vicarious position in the Iran-Iraq conflict. Battles in the border regions created terror and devastation. Aid from irrespsective governments crossed both borders. Particular organizations and individuals have benefited, consequently, aid divided the larger movement. The Kurds offered an explicit advantage to whichever government they chose to support. For example, when the Iraqis enjoyed the support of Iranian Kurds, the Iranian government was actually battling a dual defensive. Since hostilities have been minimized dramatically, the Kurds no long wield a power-broker position. Now

³⁶ Chaliand, English text, p.16.

the Kurds recognize that government attention has converged on the Kurds. As a result, the Kurds must prepare themselves for an all-out government offensive, such as the recent, devastating Iraqi offensive.

Even with government hostility becoming more dangerous, the Kurdish struggle will continue. One might suggest that the Kurds should lay down their arms and the war would end. This is not very likely. Government oppression will persist. The only prevailing question is which element of Kurdish society or culture the government will chose to oppress next. The Kurds are obligated to secure basic rights for themselves and their descendants. The Kurdish struggle of self-determination within a third world country has not received the off-hand support of the left wing in international politics so frequently offered to other groups. The "rise of the Kurds" is the thesis of the Kurdish movement.⁵⁷ The Kurds realize that they effectively have no friends. It is important for the Kurds to continue to develop skills of diplomacy in order to secure international support. The influence of outside pressure cannot be over-stated. International laws and international organizations recognize their right to self-determination. Irregardless of these statutes, the Kurds realize they struggle alone. Statutes have achieved nothing for them thus far. Government pressure has alienated the Kurds and further moved them away from assimilation. Now, they must look inward for

⁵⁷ See Bill Breen, "Kurdistan Culture Preserved", The Christian Science Monitor, 8 Feb. 1989, p.12.

strength and outward to the international community for support.

Cultural differences and international boundaries divide the Kurds and make it unlikely that they will ever unite in one state. However, Kurdish nationalism and allegiance will continue to strengthen in the face of oppression. They are not fighting modernization, they've accepted it. They are fighting to preserve their myths, ideology, and their livelihood. Kurds demand self-determination; they are obligated to exist under a system which recognizes their fundamental rights. Until these rights are assured, the Kurds will continue to struggle.

Based on fundamental differences between the parties, it is difficult to imagine a permanent solution being mediated. The issues surrounding religious differences, economic disparity, and leadership must be resolved. The Kurds will and should demand a solution as permanent as one can achieve in this volatile region. Although the Kurds seek a solution to their problems, some compromise and conciliation will be necessary. Thus far, the Kurds have never been satisfied with any autonomy settlements, I think it is important that the Kurds recognize the limitations each government faces and realize a reconstruction of some of their goals may be necessary. A long term solution to this problem will integrate the demands and pressures of all the relevant parties.

CONCLUSION

An obvious complication for the Kurdish nationalist movement is the antagonism between Kurdish, Iranian, and Iraqi political

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CONCLUSION

An obvious complication for the Kurdish nationalist movement is the antagonism between Kurdish, Iranian, and Iraqi political

aspirations. While the Iranians are dedicated to Islamic fundamentalism, and the Iraqis are concerned with internal stability and their position in the Arab world, the Kurds are committed to survival. Each government has supported some element of the Kurdish movement in order to further its own interests. The consequences have been the most severe to the Kurds, causing internal divisions and a stronger government offensive.

Iran, the vanguard Islamic Republic, adheres to Shi'a Islam and the Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic traditionalism. Despite pre-revolutionary promises to liberate the oppressed, the Islamic regime has never followed up its promises. In recent years, the foreign policy of the Iranian government has centered on the Iran-Iraq War and an anti-Western stance. The position of the Kurds has largely remained the same. Political instability has diffused any government support for Kurdish demands.

In Iraq, Saddam Hussein's determination to Arabize the country has practically led to cultural genocide for the Kurds. B'athi persecution of the Kurds is a result of the party's commitment to their pan-Arab ideology and the survival of their state. The Kurdish separatist movement has divided attempts for unity and threatened to excite other anti-regime groups. B'athi response to the Kurds and other anti-B'ath elements has been violent and oppressive. Non-Arab segments of society are suppressed because of the threats they pose to the regime. Currently however, the Kurds exist as the only major, active opposition to the government of Iraq.

By employing Iranian Kurds in the struggle against Iran and through chemical warfare, the Iraqis are openly attempting genocide. Either Iran or Iraq could exterminate the Kurds if they wished. International condemnation would be only a minor consequence; criticism would be slow, ineffective, and short-lived. Obviously, the governments of Iran and Iraq enjoy the Kurdish presence in the power-play. They are a force easily manipulated in necessary contexts, such as conflict between them, collaboration with Turkey, or coalescing with the Kurds themselves.

Most people fail to realize the significance of the Kurds because there is little information available. Unfortunately much information written on the Kurds is ambiguous and incorrect. Few newspaper or journal articles are published. Numerous books have been written, but the accuracy of the information is questionable. Statistics are outdated and unreliable. Articles tend to inaccurately describe organizations and alliances, some of which do not exist. Furthermore, many writers, including myself, are forced to rely on second-hand accounts of activities in the region. Accordingly, events are misconstrued and writing about the Kurds is complicated and difficult. The governments are primarily responsible for censoring information from the international community.

Weak response to Kurdish aspirations is a derivative of successful government policy which aims to underestimate the importance of the population. They do not want the Kurds to be recognized as an oppressed minority. Oppression tarnishes their

image and questions their ability to control the state. Furthermore, they may become the focus of international boycotts or sanctions. For these reasons, accurate statistics on the Kurds are unavailable. The governments want to diminish the size of the Kurdish population and to overstate the success of government responsibilities such as education and health services.

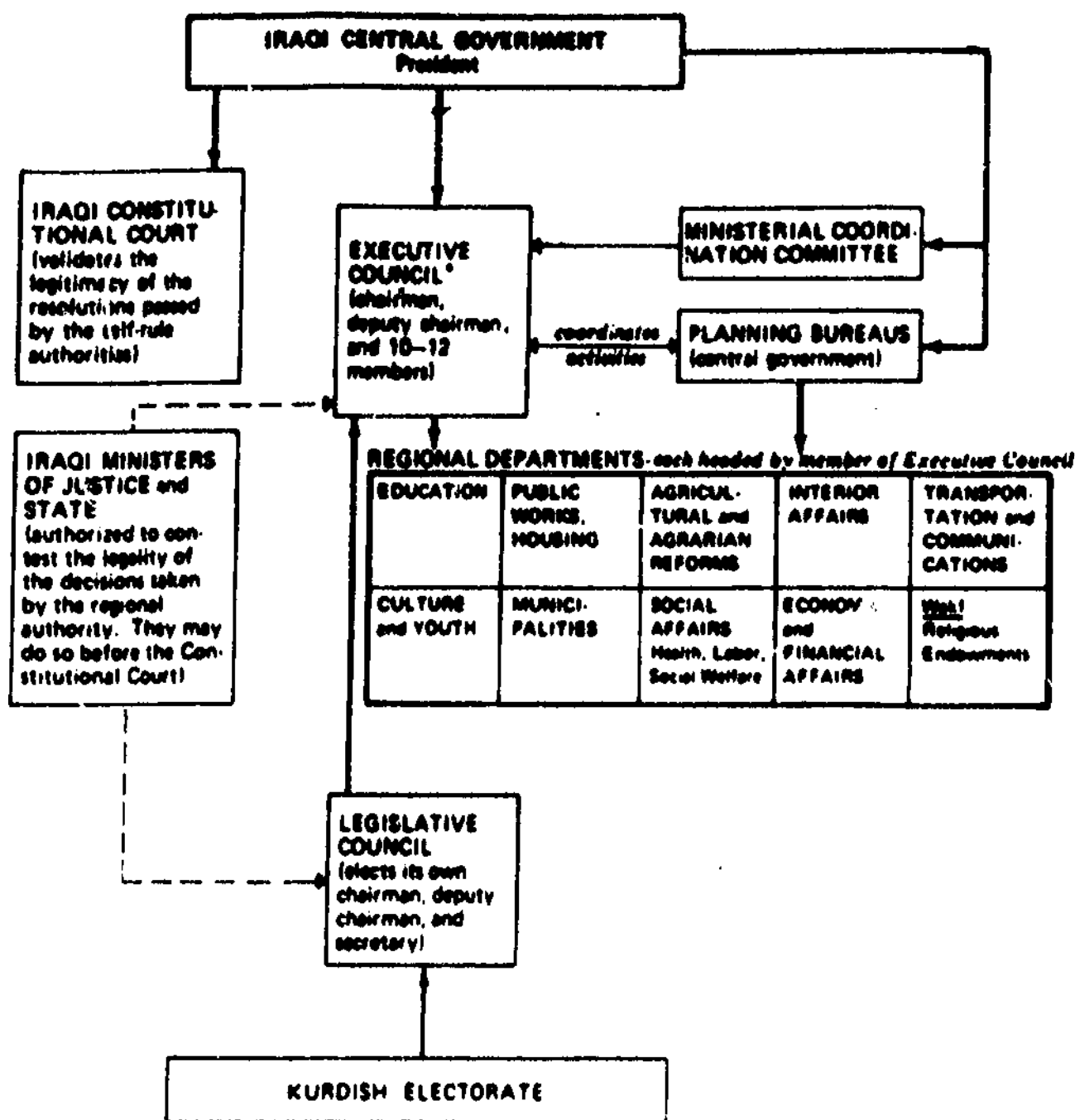
The international community is partially responsible for the lack of information on the Kurds; largely because the community has failed to respond. The Kurdish struggle has received only limited recognition by international organizations, governments, interest groups, and scholars. Only recently have the Kurds begun to overcome this. The Kurds have begun to assert themselves in the international domain by releasing publications, requesting aid, and organizing groups. In the United States, a Kurdish library has been established in Brooklyn, New York. It is slowly becoming the repository for rare Kurdish books, maps, and costumes. Subsequently, the library serves as a resource for scholars and journalists across the world. Also, a Kurdish Program of Cultural Survival and other student groups have emerged to encourage support and to promote awareness about Kurdish culture and the Kurdish struggle. The Kurds need both the material and moral support of the international community to sustain their movement.

The Kurds are an astute group of people. They are keenly aware that their national community is denied the freedom they demand. Regardless of any proclaimed government policy, they live under a "policy of terror." Their oppression is constant despite

which government is in power. The Kurdish movement is not unified. Problems center around charismatic leaders, traditional elements of society, classism, and foreign manipulation. However, the Kurdish struggle will continue. Since the Arab Conquest, ancient history documents that it is not unusual for the Kurds to rise again and have to reconquered many times. They confront their oppressors and they refuse to back down. They depend on their own strength and courage to survive. The Kurdish population is aware of its status as an oppressed nation under foreign control and the Kurdish people reserve the right to determine their own future on the land they have occupied for centuries.

APPENDIX A

Structure of the Kurdish Autonomy Plan



*Chairman is appointed by the president of the republic from among the members of the Legislative Council. The chairman in turn chooses members for the Executive Committee from among the Legislative Council. The chairman and members of the Executive Council hold the rank of minister. The president has the power to dismiss the chairman; in such a case, the Executive Committee is dissolved.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

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INTERVIEW

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